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STATE COUNCIL OF CIVIL DEFENSE  
MAIN CAPITOL BUILDING  
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

August 15, 1955

INFORMATION CIRCULAR NO. 64

NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

INTERIM POLICY RELATING TO  
ISSUANCE OF STORM WARNINGS AND BULLETINS

1. Pending Assembly action on current legislation granting the State Council of Civil Defense legal authority to act in "natural disasters" (see Information Circular No. 63, dated August 10, 1955), the Council will follow the interim policy outlined below, insofar as the issuance of storm warnings and bulletins is concerned.

2. The State Council of Civil Defense, through its main control center in Harrisburg, is in constant, direct wire contact, including both telephone and a special teletypewriter circuit, with the Harrisburg Office of the United States Weather Bureau. By this means, the Council is at all times kept fully informed of current weather conditions and forecasts. This information includes, of course, practically all essential facts relating to possible dangers from hurricanes, tornadoes and floods.

3. Because of excessive costs involved in statewide wire transmission of periodic storm bulletins, the State Council of Civil Defense will adhere to the following general policy relating to dissemination of storm warnings and bulletins:

- (a) County and Local Civil Defense Directors will be expected to keep generally informed of possible local storm dangers by means of local Weather Bureau releases made through local news sources, including press, radio and television.
- (b) The State Council of Civil Defense promptly will notify all County Directors concerned, by means of telephone, telegraph or other emergency channels, of any and all known, or reliably reported, conditions believed to offer true threat of serious danger within their respective counties. While absolute guarantee of delivery obviously cannot be made, every effort will be exerted in attempts to provide these warnings well in advance of threatened danger and in ample time to permit essential advance preparations for emergency.



- (c) In addition to warnings of the specific type referred to in subparagraph (b), immediately above, the State Council of Civil Defense will disseminate to County Directors such special storm bulletins as may be deemed necessary either to supply essential information otherwise not readily obtainable, or to allay fears, or apprehension, arising from spread of misinformation. (An example of this type of bulletin is the August 10, 1955 telegram addressed to all County Directors. The purpose of this message was to provide official information concerning the status of Hurricane Connie and to counter widespread, erroneous reports to the effect that the State would be struck by winds of hurricane force late the same day.)
- (d) Local Directors will be expected to rely on their respective County Offices of Civil Defense for relay of storm warnings and bulletins issued by the State Council of Civil Defense.
- (e) The guiding principle governing the issuance and dissemination of all storm warnings and bulletins shall be to provide essential information concerning true dangers and to allay fear and apprehension arising from possible false rumors.

In brief, the State Council of Civil Defense will make every effort both to provide County Civil Defense Directors with prompt warning of threatened storm dangers within their respective counties, and to furnish such essential information relating to general storm conditions as may be believed to be locally unavailable. During periods of possible widespread danger, County Directors may generally assume that lack of warnings, or bulletins, from the State Council means that information available to the Council indicates no serious threat of danger. In occasional instances, the same lack may be taken to mean that the Council has received no information on the subject. When in serious doubt as to the current situation, requests for information may be directed either to Harrisburg or to the Area Office concerned.

4. For the information and conveniences of all County and Local Civil Defense Directors, there are listed below a number of the principle terms, together with their respective meanings, frequently used by the United States Weather Bureau in the issuance of storm warnings and bulletins, particularly those relating to hurricanes.

- (a) Hurricane Alert. This means that an official hurricane warning (see subparagraph (b), immediately below) is likely to be issued within the next thirty-six (36) hours. In general, hurricane alerts "cover" relatively large areas. These may embrace either the entire State or some major portion of it, such as "that area east of the Susquehanna River". Broadly speaking, a "hurricane alert" is a sort of "precautionary bulletin" of primary interest to those shipping, transportation, industrial and other organizations which require maximum advance notice of possible storm dangers.



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- (b) Hurricane Warning. This means that a hurricane is expected to strike within twenty-four (24) hours. Insofar as possible, such warnings will be issued roughly twenty-four (24) hours in advance of the time the storm is expected to reach maximum intensity, but they should by no means be considered a "definite time indicator", as numerous variable factors may "bring the storm in" either later or earlier than anticipated. Like "hurricane alerts" (see subparagraph (a), immediately above), hurricane warnings generally "cover" relatively large areas, possibly including all or some major portion of the State.
- (c) Wind Classification. Winds with velocities from 39 to 54 m.p.h. are termed "gale winds"; those from 55 to 72 m.p.h. are called "whole gale winds"; while those of 73 m.p.h. and above are classed as "hurricane winds". As a rough rule of thumb, it may be assumed that winds in the lower "gale" range will tear off tree limbs and cause similar damage. Those in the upper "gale" range may be expected to cause far more extensive damage to trees, consequent utility line breakage and minor structural damage. Winds with velocities ranging from 60 to 70 m.p.h. usually will "topple" many trees, cause major disruption of wire utilities and sometimes appreciable structural damage. "Hurricane winds", varying more or less in direct proportion to their velocities, may be expected to cause serious and extensive damage to trees, utility lines and structures of different kinds. (It should always be remembered that these rather broad "estimates" are subject to wide variation. For example, when trees are wet and their roots are "loosened" by rain soaking of the ground, winds of roughly 50 m.p.h. velocity may result in widespread "tree toppling". In addition, winds of "gale" and greater velocities almost always cause "freak damage" of various kinds.)

In the issuance of storm warnings and bulletins, the State Council of Civil Defense will utilize, in general, the above terminology, which is essentially that of the United States Weather Bureau. (This terminology differs in some respects from that used by the Armed Services, but military warnings and bulletins are issued primarily for the guidance of military personnel, rather than the public at large.)

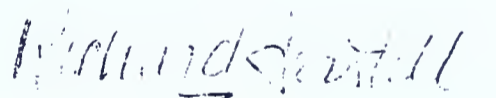
5. In the event of hurricane alerts, and more particularly hurricane warnings, County Civil Defense Directors strongly are urged publicly to disseminate as widely as possible the "Official Hurricane Precautions for Householders" furnished to all County Offices of Civil Defense under date of August 9, 1955. Press, radio, television and all other available channels should be used for this purpose, being certain to emphasize dangers from downed wires. (A revised and enlarged "precautions list" will be furnished all County and Local Directors shortly following receipt of supplemental information currently being prepared by the United States Weather Bureau.)



6. Just as County Civil Defense Directors may look to the State Council of Civil Defense for warnings and information relating to possible widespread dangers, the Council will expect County Directors promptly to provide Harrisburg, or the Area Office concerned, with essential information relating to localized dangers and disasters of major consequence. (An example is the recent Ohio explosion which destroyed two buildings and killed 20, or more, people.) In the submission of these reports, use the following "Administrative" telephone numbers: For Eastern Area - Quakertown 1400; for Central Area - Lewistown 3381; for Western Area - Butler 5-7775; and for Harrisburg - Cedar 8-0421 or 8-5151, extension 2021.

7. In order to make certain that the Harrisburg and Area Office emergency call lists are both accurate and up-to-date, all County Civil Defense Directors have been furnished with a standard form to be used in providing current information on emergency contacts. Unless absolutely certain that county emergency call lists are accurate and up-to-date, it is strongly recommended that all County Directors promptly obtain basically similar information from their respective Local Directors.

8. The policy herein outlined will remain in effect until such time as written notice of its revision, or recision, may be received.

  
Richard Gerstell  
Director of Civil Defense

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